

MAN IN OSCILLATION BETWEEN MATERIALISM AND SPIRITUALISM - REVISITING BHAGAVAD GITA TO EXPLORE SOLUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Man, the most intelligent of all species, has made a mark for himself; has proved to possess excelling qualities to rein the animal kingdom. Man with his thinking capacity and analytic nature coupled with reasoning capabilities, is certainly the best of all living creatures; he has been bestowed to have feelings, emotions and tender thoughts of love and concern. A man is the worst of the creations, if he is devoid of all subtle and delicate feelings for the other.

There is a very close relationship between Literature and the **Bhagavad Gita**.

The Bhagavad Gita is a treasure house of wisdom and knowledge, a ready beckoner for reference for man to take a dip into and emerge with a feeling of completeness yet thirst to go it again and again as, man's life is such that, he is always in quest of true happiness and contentment. In the **Bhagavad Gita**, Lord Krishna answers Arjuna's lingering doubts and clears his dilemma to wage war against his kith and kin in the battlefield of Kurukshetra, being fought between the Pandavas and the Kauravas.

KEYWORDS: Man in Oscillation, Materialism and Spiritualism, Bhagavad Gita

INTRODUCTION

Hermann Graf Keyserling, German Philosopher regarded Bhagavad-Gita as "Perhaps the most beautiful work of the literature of the world." [11]

Literature portrays man's life with its simplicity and magnanimity; its triumphs and trivialities; its hopes and despairs; its constant trials to succeed, invent innovative ways of scientific and technological advancements to achieve great heights of glorious splendor on the ladder of the human scale. There have been generations after generations, treading on the path to glory. There has been a constant growth in the making of a perfect man. There have been scientists, inventors, discoverers, who have all been the trend setters for man to improve his standards of living in all aspects. There has been improvement in terms of more comfort, more luxuries, more amenities, more fancies, for an easy living in the modern era. It will be an excellent thing to blend this with a moral living, embedded with values. Value of life is so important that it needs to be nurtured with a sense of high thinking and noble qualities. These need to be inculcated along with the high sophistication of today. For this, an element of the knowledge of our ancient scriptures is essential; the sacred epics which offer the essence of life, are to be truly understood and their morals to be imbibed.

Man has journeyed a long way, from the Stone Age to the present computer age; he has had his share of endeavors and experiences and learnt from the lessons taught by life. Man is seen excelling in a writer, a poet, an artist in

the form of a painter, a singer, a dancer, an architect, an engineer, a doctor, a lawyer, and many professions that could sustain him on the planet earth. He is God's best creation. It is up to him to make the best use of the resources available and benefit thereby. He is the only creature to have the capacity to speak. This speaking capability can therefore, be utilized so as to benefit mankind in a positive way.

Man, the most intelligent of all species, has made a mark for himself; has proved to possess excelling qualities to rein the animal kingdom. Man with his thinking capacity and analytic nature coupled with reasoning capabilities, is certainly the best of all living creatures; he has been bestowed to have feelings, emotions and tender thoughts of love and concern. A man is the worst of the creations, if he is devoid of all subtle and delicate feelings for the other. He then, is a burden to mother earth. Life is a cyclic process; it revolves around birth and death. Neither can be controlled by man; it is all in the hands of the Supreme God.

The Supreme God being omnipresent, manifests in every object. God is the supreme energy or the force behind every movement in the universe.

"I See Myself in Everyone and Everyone in Myself"

This is God's affirmation to Arjuna, that He is omnipresent and omniscient.

In the Mahabharata, India's great epic, Lord Krishna shields the Pandavas in the war between them and the Kauravas in the battlefield of Kurukshetra. Arjuna is the third of the Pandava brothers; with the divine advice given by Lord Krishna to Arjuna of the spiritual approach towards situations in life, Arjuna marches ahead to fight against the evil forces.

In the Bhagavad Gita, the Lord promises: In whatever way people are devoted to Me, in that of measure I manifest Myself to them. All men, in every manner (of seeking Me), pursue a path to Me. —The Bhagavad Gita IV:11

The path to attain God lies in the path of right living. Righteous living is being on the right path, doing good and being good. Help rendered to the needy and helpless, help rendered without expecting anything in return, unconditional and timely help to anyone without distinction, is true help and this is Godliness; a certain way to attain God. Doing one's duty irrespective of its rewards, is an onerous attitude to be cultivated by individuals. Being considerate with an open mind, having forbearance to tolerate, adjust and accommodate, are some qualities with which, one can make oneself happy and make others happy. One can be at peace if qualities like purity, truth, humility, patience and sweetness are imbibed with conscious effort, concentration and determination.

The Bhagavad Gita contains the entire knowledge of the universe depicting the quintessence of the valuable four Vedas, one hundred and eight Upanishads, and the six systems of Hindu philosophy. It can be interpreted to be working on three levels of an individual: *body, mind and soul*. Execution of duties and right karma through the body, pure thoughts and positive thinking through the mind and realization of the divinity in one's soul.

The Bhagavad Gita is a treasure house of wisdom and knowledge, a ready beckoner for reference for man to take a dip into and emerge with a feeling of completeness yet thirst to go it again and again as, man's life is such that, he is always in quest of true happiness and contentment. In the **Bhagavad Gita**, Lord Krishna answers Arjuna's lingering doubts and clears his dilemma to wage war against his kith and kin.

The Bhagavad Gita containing the philosophy of life, is a divine song, hence the name, Gita; *it is an authentic text*

in the form of a dialogue between Lord Krishna and Arjuna.

Such words of wisdom are to be assimilated by man at every step in the present and in the future too! The **Bhagavad Gita** embodies and signifies life's virtual problems and solutions in a judicious way.

The eighteen chapters of the Bhagavad Gita speak of man's righteous existence in a given condition. They make life easier to understand and lead virtuously and rightfully. The Bhagavad Gita is a perfect guide to man's progress on the spiritual path; a proper understanding and clarity of the great work is required for one to experience its true essence and benefit thereby. Man will be wiser, if he imbibes every word of it and pursues it for his improvement – that of body and soul.

Educating Arjuna of the relationship between the body and soul, Lord Krishna says:

Just as an individual forsaking dilapidated raiment dons new clothes, so the body-encased soul, relinquishing decayed bodily habitations, enters others that are new. – The Bhagavad Gita II: 22

The soul is uncleavable [indivisible]; it cannot be burnt or wetted or dried. The soul is immutable, all-permeating, ever calm, and immovable— eternally the same —The Bhagavad Gita II: 24

Body and soul, both being two different entities, must be considered and treated differently, each with its unique potentiality. Each complimenting the other, must eventually work together for a righteous living. Soul is said to be an eternal source of light and the body, its costume, which is to be adorned in every cycle of birth and death. Soul therefore, is permanent and the body, impermanent. When the body is such a fragile and a temporary existence, why get attached and cling to it! One must realize its impermanence and giving it due respect, become soul conscious and emerge as a divine personality. One must become aware of the fact that, life is a stage wherein, a person is supposed to play different roles, meet different souls on their way to perfection and try to blend a simple and a principled living, doing good and being good and following the policy of live and let live.

The soul performs its function of sustaining life in a body, playing its role by expressing and experiencing the rewards of previous births through the body of which, it is a life source.

III: 36-41

The senses, mind, and intellect are said to be desire's formidable stronghold; through these, desire deludes the embodied soul by eclipsing its wisdom; says Lord Krishna.

Therefore, O Best of the Bharata Dynasty (Arjuna)! First discipline the senses, then destroy desire, the sinful annihilator of wisdom and Self-realization.

The Bhakti yoga (having undeterred faith in the supreme life force – God), Karma yoga (believing in one's actions and the results of the same in previous, present and future births and perform one's duties in that perspective) and the Jnana yoga (which paves the way to wisdom and knowledge), assure man of continuous guidance through life's confusion and turmoil.

The Path of Knowledge — Jnana Yoga says that, "That man of action is free from karma who receives with contentment whatever befalls him, who is poised above the dualities, who is devoid of jealousy or envy or enmity, and who looks equally on gain and loss." —The Bhagavad Gita IV

The modern, contentious man seems to be in conflict – between the right and the wrong, the dilemma between two divergent things, the clash of thoughts in the mind and the intellect, and ideas imposed by others on an individual, the struggle and the turmoil that one faces; finally, the decision taken, in an attempt to succeed and be on the right path – so many things to think and ponder upon, for a better living of a man of principles and human values!

In the **Bhagavad Gita**, we find that unhappiness is in the mind as long as one is attached to one's body and relations thereby; when one is soul conscious, everything becomes light and peaceful. A realization of this concept can give man the solace and wisdom that Arjuna had got from Lord Krishna. Arjuna may be considered to be our sensitive mind in oscillation between the right choice to be made and Krishna to be the guiding force behind one's thoughts in the battle of life. In the **Bhagavad Gita**, one can therefore find an amalgamation of peace and bliss; a synthesis of harmony and happiness; a clear vision of one's moral duties and obligations to be bound by for a committed life in the society of today.

Sri Aurobindo, felt that the "**Bhagavad Gita** is a true scripture of the human race a living creation rather than a book, with a new message for every age and a new meaning for every civilization." [5]

The **Gita** has its influence on the West too.

Orientalism, the term used by art historians and scholars of the literary and cultural studies for the imitation or depiction of Middle Eastern and East Asian cultures by writers, designers and artists from the West, was one of the many specialisms of 19th-century Academic art, and the literatures of Western countries took a similar interest in Oriental themes.

The **Bhagavad Gita** has been accepted to be a guiding factor by not only Indians but also by writers like Aldous Huxley, Henry David Thoreau, J. Robert Oppenheimer, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Carl Jung, Hermann Hesse, and others.[1][2][3] Albert Schweitzer found in Gita "a profound influence on the spirit of mankind by its devotion to God which is manifested by actions." [4]

Ralph Waldo Emerson expressed his feelings about the **Bhagavad Gita**: "I owed a magnificent day to the Bhagavad-Gita. It was as if an empire spoke to us, nothing small or unworthy, but large, serene, consistent, the voice of an old intelligence which in another age and climate had pondered and thus disposed of the same questions which exercise us." [12]

Henry David Thoreau, a nineteenth-century American writer, after reading the first English translation of the **Gita**, got inspired and wrote an essay, 'On Civil Disobedience,' about how to cope with societal injustice. Henry David Thoreau also wrote, "In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial." [10]

The dilemma that Arjuna faced can be linked to any situation in one's life and the right solacing answer may be taken from the **Gita**, as, we may find ourselves facing throughout our life, an indistinguishable picture and the difficult decision to be chosen between things to be done in the right perspective and so on, which may only have a thin line of partly good and partly bad effects.

The following quotes from the **Bhagavad Gita**, may be referred to, by all, to attain the right knowledge and lead a peaceful and contented life:

Lord Krishna's advice to Arjuna on having even mindedness:

Arjuna, the ideas of heat and cold, pleasure and pain, are produced by the contacts of the senses with their objects. Such ideas are limited by a beginning and an end. They are transitory, O Arjuna; bear them with patience!—The Bhagavad Gita II: 14

O Flower among Men (Arjuna)! He who cannot be ruffled by these (contacts of the senses with their objects), who is calm and even minded during pain and pleasure, he alone is fit to attain everlastingness!


The impermanent has no reality; reality lies in the eternal. Those who have seen the boundary between these two have attained the end of all knowledge. —The Bhagavad Gita II:15

Brooding on sense objects causes attachment to them. Attachment breeds craving; craving breeds anger. Anger breeds delusion; delusion breeds loss of memory (of the Self). Loss of right memory causes decay of the discriminating faculty. From decay of discrimination, annihilation (of spiritual life) follows. —The Bhagavad Gita II:62-63

Lord Krishna's advice to Arjuna on Wisdom and Ignorance:

O Winner of Wealth (Arjuna), he who has relinquished work by yoga, and who has torn apart his doubts by wisdom, becomes poised in the Self; actions do not entangle him. —The Bhagavad Gita IV:41

The Science of Meditation, a Kriya Yoga imparting knowledge of Soul-Realization, a breath controlling technique, regulates one's breath evenly, providing oxygen to the lungs and aiding in proper functioning; thereby, balancing the mind and senses and being at peace.

Chanting , **AUM (OM)**, the two syllabic word, provides powerful sound vibrations depicting the whole universe, having a curative effect on the mind and body of an individual when one's attention shifts from the material to the spiritual world, gaining eternal peace and super sensual bliss, radiated through the spiritual energy derived thereby. Man attains self-mastery when he believes in himself and has faith in God. Walking on the virtuous path gives man the confidence of mastering one's own self. Thus, to have control over mind is to have control over thought processes, having positive thoughts and positive attitude, negating negative thoughts and waste thoughts, creating noble thoughts leading to noble actions.

Lord Krishna says,

As a boat on the waters is carried off course by a gale, so an individual's discrimination is driven from its intended path when the mind succumbs to the wandering senses. —The Bhagavad Gita II:67

He is full with contentment who absorbs all desires within, as the brimful ocean remains unmoved (unchanged) by waters entering into it—not he who lusts after desires. —The Bhagavad Gita II:70

Hermann Hesse felt that "the marvel of the Bhagavad-Gita is its truly beautiful revelation of life's wisdom which enables philosophy to blossom into religion." [5]

The **Bhagavad Gita** was a motivating factor to many freedom fighters during India's freedom struggle. The **Gita** was Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's 'spiritual dictionary'. [9] He said, "The object of the **Gita** appears to me to be that of showing the most excellent way to attain self-realization", and this can be achieved by selfless action, "By desireless action; by renouncing fruits of action; by dedicating all activities to God, i.e., by surrendering oneself to Him body and soul." Gandhi also called the **Gita** "The Gospel of Selfless Action".

The **Bhagavad Gita**'s emphasis on selfless service was a prime source of inspiration for Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. Gandhi opined-"When doubts haunt me, when disappointments stare me in the face, and I see not one ray of hope on the horizon, I turn to **Bhagavad Gita** and find a verse to comfort me; and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming sorrow. Those who meditate on the **Gita** will derive fresh joy and new meanings from it every day". [5]

Thy human right is for activity only, never for the resultant fruit of actions. Do not consider thyself the creator of the fruits of thy activities; neither allow thyself attachment to inactivity.

O Dhananjaya (Arjuna), remaining immersed in yoga, perform all actions, forsaking attachment (to their fruits), being indifferent to success and failure. This mental evenness is termed yoga. —The Bhagavad Gita II: 47-48

Ordinary action (performed with desire) is greatly inferior to action united to the guidance of wisdom; therefore, O Dhananjaya (Arjuna), seek shelter in the ever-directing wisdom. Miserable are those who perform actions only for their fruits. —The Bhagavad Gita II: 49

Verses like the above, seemed to comfort Gandhi.

O Arjuna, as the ignorant perform actions with attachment and hope of reward, so the wise should act with dispassionate nonattachment, to serve gladly as a guide for the multitudes. —The Bhagavad Gita III:25

Swami Vivekananda was influenced by the **Bhagavad Gita** to a large extent and gave inspirational messages to the youth in turn, to follow the path of righteousness and glory.

We find Aldous Huxley, the English writer, rightly commenting that, the **Gita** is "the most systematic statement of spiritual evolution of endowing value to mankind.", He also felt, **Gita** is "one of the most clear and comprehensive summaries of perennial philosophy ever revealed; hence its enduring value is subject not only to India but to all of humanity." [5] Wilhelm von Humboldt pronounced the **Gita** as: "The most beautiful, perhaps the only true philosophical song existing in any known tongue ... perhaps the deepest and loftiest thing the world has to show." [13]

So, it can certainly be proudly proclaimed that, the **Gita** has been a great influencing factor to many across the globe, being a binding agent between the East and the West.

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